

ConnectED Briefing #4

Interagency working with people with multiple or complex needs

The issue

Social care practitioners often work with different organisations when supporting someone with multiple or complex needs, but working with different agencies is not always as effective as it could be.

What we wanted to find out

What approaches to interagency working best support those working with adults with complex/multiple needs?

What we did

We defined people with complex needs as adults with multiple needs who need a high level of support with aspects of daily life.

We searched for relevant reviews of evidence and research studies published since 2015. We used CASP tools to assess the quality of the evidence.

What we found

We found an analysis of 40 serious case reviews (SCRs¹) that featured self-neglect¹; the report of a review of literature published on adult care responses to self neglect², and two qualitative studies of joint working between the police, health and social care staff. The first focused on mental-health related antisocial behaviour³, the second on interagency working in adult support and protection in Scotland⁴ (known as safeguarding in England).

What the evidence suggests

Good practice in interagency working involves having a team around the adult and an organisation around the team.

Communication and collaboration

An interagency approach enables the team around the adult to share collective responsibility for assessment and management of needs and risks of the person with complex needs. Effective interagency

¹ Serious case reviews (SCRs) were replaced by Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs) in the Care Act 2014. SARs must be arranged when an adult experiences serious neglect or an adult dies as a result of abuse or neglect and there is concern that partner agencies could have worked more effectively to protect the adult. The purpose of the SCR and SAR is to promote learning and identify good practice.

working is supported by good communication and structured information sharing methods. Co-location supports the development of informal relationships and greater collaborative working.

Processes/Structures

Interagency working can be driven by legal requirements to protect people. Formal frameworks such as MAPPA (Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements) can enable working across organisations, but protocols must be fit for purpose, and detail clear referral pathways and processes that support interagency working.

Formal meetings enable all organisations involved with the person to share their specialist knowledge, discuss ideas to reduce risks and coordinate action.

Understanding each other's roles

Understanding the roles of professionals in other agencies supports staff to recognise and respect different professional perspectives. Robust interagency working should include constructive challenge and debate and a willingness to work towards shared outcomes for the person they are working with rather than focus on tasks specific to their organisation. Establishing a shared understanding of risk can be helpful.

Lead professional

The review of SCRs recommends appointing a lead professional to coordinate information from all agencies, and prevent 'agency overload' for service users.

Organisational support to social care practitioners

Supervision and opportunities to reflect support staff who may be working in situations where there are concerns and the person is reluctant to engage with support. Cases involving self-neglect should be allocated to experienced workers with sufficient training, qualifications and resilience or be co-worked with another, more experienced staff member.

Training that supports good interagency working includes:

- Legal training for staff to understand the framework of their organisational and ethical responsibilities, and those of other agencies
- Decision-making for weighing evidence and sharing information, and
- Training to help practitioners to manage their own stress.

Staff should be supported by individual managers, or groups such as the Safeguarding Adults Board overseeing their work. Oversight can include auditing cases, challenging decision-making with the interagency team around the adult and supported real-time management of risk for people who decline services to support them.

Conclusions

Effective communication, and understanding and valuing each other's roles, support interagency working. Clear processes, formal meetings and information sharing protocols, support an interagency approach. Different professionals have distinct perspectives of risk when working with people with complex needs. Practitioners should receive a range of training when working with people with complex needs and should be supported by managers overseeing their work.

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References

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